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PERCEIVED ROLE AND TASK CHARACTERISTIC INFLUENCES ON
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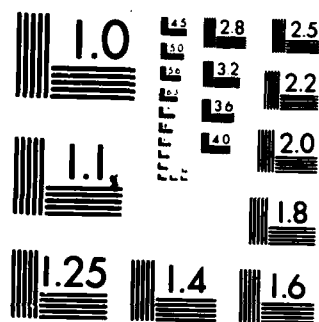
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**PERCEIVED ROLE AND TASK CHARACTERISTIC
INFLUENCES ON JOB SATISFACTION,
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT, AND TURNOVER
DECISION-MAKING AMONG NAVY HEALTH CARE
ADMINISTRATORS**

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Perceived Role and Task Characteristic Influences
on Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment,
and Turnover Decision-Making among Navy
Health Care Administrators

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*Health Psychology Department.

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SUMMARY

Considerable evidence has accumulated regarding the value of role stress, role orientation, perceived task characteristics, and other background variables in explaining variation in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover decision-making. For the most part, interest in job satisfaction and commitment has focused on identifying their antecedents and correlates. Relatively few studies, however, are grounded in a common theoretical framework for selecting such variables and producing integrated, predictive, multivariate models of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational withdrawal. Further, questions exist regarding whether antecedent variables are equally or differentially related to the development of either construct.

The present study investigated the differential effects of personal, role, and perceived task characteristic measures on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. It was hypothesized that (a) a combination of perceived task characteristic and role ambiguity measures would be more related to job satisfaction than to organizational commitment, (b) a combination of personal characteristics, role orientation, and role conflict would be more strongly related to organizational commitment than to job satisfaction, and (c) turnover decision-making would be directly related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment and only indirectly influenced by role stress, role orientation, and perceived task characteristics.

Questionnaire data were obtained from 657 Health Care Administrators serving on active duty with the Navy Medical Service Corps. Correlation and regression techniques were used to test the hypotheses as stated. Results indicated that job scope was uniquely related to job satisfaction and not to organizational commitment. In addition, the role orientation variables were related to organizational commitment, and essentially unrelated to job satisfaction. Further, the results indicated support for the third hypothesis in that measures of job satisfaction and organizational commitment appeared to be directly related to turnover decision-making while task characteristics, role stress, and role orientation were best seen as antecedent correlates of satisfaction and commitment. Finally, there were instances of mixed results. For example, the role stress measures did not surface in terms of satisfaction or commitment as clearly as expected. Implications for theories of organizational commitment and retention are discussed.

Perceived Role and Task Characteristic Influences on Job Satisfaction,
Organizational Commitment, and Turnover Decision-Making among Navy Health Care
Administrators

Steers (1977) has proposed and supported a model of organizational commitment. This model argues that input from a number of antecedent variables such as personal characteristics (e.g., age, education, and tenure), job characteristics (e.g., autonomy, feedback, and task identity), and work experiences (e.g., group attitudes, expectations met, and personal importance) influence the organizational commitment of an individual which, in turn, influences the employee's desire to remain, intent to remain, and ultimately decision to remain a member of the referent organization. While the Steers model appears valid, he has noted the likelihood that a number of intervening variables could mediate the commitment relationship.

For example, House and Rizzo (1972) indicated that role conflict and ambiguity are related to decreases in organizational effectiveness and satisfaction, which results in an increased likelihood that an individual will leave the organization. Miles (1975) suggested a causal relationship between job satisfaction and both role conflict and ambiguity. Again, it was noted that job satisfaction decreased as role conflict and ambiguity increased. Lyons (1971) reported that voluntary turnover and propensity to leave the organization decreased as role clarity increased. Finally, Organ and Greene (1981) found that alienation was positively related to both role conflict and ambiguity.

The evidence presented does suggest that the Steers (1977) model lacks a number of possible intervening variables such as role stress, role orientation, and job satisfaction, that might be useful in explaining variation in organizational commitment. Thus, to complete the picture, the antecedents of commitment identified in the Steers model might be profitably linked to other variables, for example role stress. Walsh, Taber, and Beehr (1980) provided evidence to support this linkage, indicating that some of the job characteristics (i.e., task feedback, supervisor feedback, autonomy, variety) discussed by Steers were positively related to role clarity and challenge. Consequently, global satisfaction increased as role clarity and challenge increased. Similarly, Bedeian and Armenakis (1981) and House and Rizzo (1972) provided a rationale for

a possible connection between role tension, job satisfaction, and one's propensity to leave the organization. Finally, the personal characteristics portion of Steers' model is integrated into the present study via Becker's (1960) side bet theory in that individual investments tend to accumulate over time and may work through role orientation to influence role conflict and, ultimately, retention decisions and organizational commitment.

In summary, studies on organizational commitment suggest that commitment is the result of job characteristics, personal characteristics, and work experiences. It was also suggested that commitment is a useful predictor of voluntary turnover, desire to remain, and intent to remain with the referent organization. Further, role conflict and ambiguity were shown to relate to some of the same antecedent variables as commitment. Additionally, it has been observed that role conflict and ambiguity influence job satisfaction, which in turn has an impact on many of the same outcomes of organizational commitment. Finally, in terms of role orientation, evidence suggests that bureaucratically role-oriented individuals may differ from professionally role-oriented workers in the manner in which they are affected by the variables influencing organizational withdrawal.

Based on the foregoing, it was hypothesized that (a) a combination of perceived task characteristics and role ambiguity measures would be more strongly related to job satisfaction than to organizational commitment, (b) a combination of personal characteristics, role orientation, and role conflict would be more strongly related to organizational commitment than to job satisfaction, and (c) turnover decision-making would be directly related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment and only indirectly influenced by role stress, role orientation and perceived task characteristic.

Method

Sample and procedure. Survey data were obtained, via mailout questionnaire, from 657 Health Care Administrators (HCA) serving on active duty within the Navy Medical Service Corps (MSC). The HCA group represents one of three major occupational subdivisions within the MSC, and their duties and responsibilities cover a wide range of administrative activities (e.g., food service administration, data processing, supply). The remainder of the MSC is comprised of Health Science and Technology and Clinical Care occupations, whose primary function is concerned with research and development or direct patient care, respectively. Because of the more cohesive, administrative nature of their work,

it was felt that the HCA group provided a better representation of both professional and bureaucratic role orientations than did other MSC professionals, and they were thus targeted for study.

Examination of demographic variables revealed that 54% of the survey respondents were junior grade officers (Ensign, Lieutenant junior grade, or Lieutenant), 32% were middle grade officers (Lieutenant Commander), while the remaining 14% were senior grade officers (Commander and Captain). Three percent of the sample were female and the modal age ranged between 30 and 34 years. Eleven percent of the respondents had not completed all requirements for the Bachelor's degree, 47% had completed requirements at the Master's degree level, and the remaining 2% were at the Doctoral level. A comparison of the HCA group with the remaining members of the MSC community revealed no significant differences in terms of rank, age, sex, or length of commissioned service.

Measures and analysis. Background measures included single item assessments of rank, education, and organizational level, which were summed to form a personal characteristics composite. The rationale underlying the creation of this composite was to develop a single measure to account for a combination of variables which others have found to be significant correlates of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, or turnover intention (cf. Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Morris & Sherman, 1981). Items were evaluated so that higher scores represented more senior rank, higher educational level, and a more prominent organizational level, or position. Internal consistency reliability for this composite (coefficient alpha) was .727.

Perceived task characteristics were determined using the short form of the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 1976). Responses to the 15 items were summed to form an overall measure of job scope ($\alpha = .802$). Role conflict and role ambiguity were measured using items originally developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) and Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) as modified by Jones and James (1979). Coefficient alphas for the role conflict and role ambiguity measures were .778 and .785, respectively.

Additional variables included a single-item assessment of intent to remain with the organization, a three-item measure of general, or overall job satisfaction ($\alpha = .815$; Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 1976), and an abbreviated version of the organizational commitment scale developed by Porter and his colleagues (Porter, Crampon, & Smith, 1976; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; $\alpha =$

.848). The separate, three-item measures of bureaucratic ($\alpha = .887$) and professional ($\alpha = .587$) role orientations were based on the earlier work reported by Miller and Wager (1971). Finally, correlational and stepwise multiple regression procedures were used to test the hypotheses stated earlier.

Results

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the major study variables. In general, the relationships shown were consistent both with current expectations and with the results of previous research. Briefly, the first hypothesis stated that a combination of task characteristics (i.e., job scope) and role ambiguity would be more strongly related to overall job satisfaction than to organizational commitment. Inspection of the values shown in Table 1 indicated results consistent with this hypothesis. First, the relationship between job scope and role ambiguity ($r = -.56$) was significantly greater than the relationship between job scope and role conflict ($r = -.31$; $t = -8.82$, $p < .001$). Second, the relationship between job scope and job satisfaction ($r = .68$) was also significantly greater than the corresponding relationship between job scope and organizational commitment ($r = .26$; $t = 12.72$, $p < .001$).

The full meaning of such differences are seen more clearly when the appropriate partial correlations were examined. In the case of role ambiguity and job scope, for example, the value reported above ($-.56$) reduced to $-.49$ when the effects of role conflict were partialled out. When ambiguity was partialled from the role conflict-job scope relationship, the $-.31$ correlation reduced to $.04$. Thus, in terms of role tension and job scope, the majority of influence is directly attributable to role ambiguity and not role conflict.

Similarly, relationships involving job scope, satisfaction, and commitment were examined in terms of partial correlations. The $.68$ correlation between job scope and job satisfaction reduced to $.65$ when the effects of organizational commitment were held constant. When job satisfaction was removed from the job scope-organizational commitment relationship ($r = .26$), the resulting partial correlation was $.05$, indicating that job scope is uniquely related to satisfaction and essentially unrelated to organizational commitment.

Finally, a partial correlation was computed for the relationship between role ambiguity and job satisfaction, removing effects due to role conflict. In this instance, the $-.47$ correlation between ambiguity and satisfaction dropped to $-.32$.

TABLE 1
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Variables of Interest for
Health Care Administrator Respondents
(N = 657)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	M	S.D.
A. Personal characteristics	1.00									11.26	3.66
B. Job scope	.07	1.00								82.81	14.96
C. Bureaucratic role	.03	.02	1.00							12.54	2.18
D. Professional role	.03	-.02	.30**	1.00						9.36	2.11
E. Role ambiguity	-.10**	-.56**	-.06	.05	1.00					18.60	5.44
F. Role conflict	-.02	-.31**	-.05	.07*	.60**	1.00				23.12	5.09
G. Overall job satisfaction	.05	.68**	.08*	-.003	-.47**	-.39**	1.00			15.72	4.64
H. Organizational commitment	-.03	.26**	.23**	-.16**	-.34**	-.31**	.33**	1.00		25.12	4.63
I. Turnover intention	-.12**	.24**	.02	-.12**	-.28**	-.26**	.44**	.42**	1.00	3.97	1.31

*p < .05

**p < .01

When the effects of role ambiguity were removed from the role conflict-job satisfaction relationship ($-.39$), the resultant partial correlation was $.15$. Thus, for role stress and job satisfaction relationships, ambiguity was more strongly related to job satisfaction than role conflict, as hypothesized.

The second hypothesis stated that a combination of personal characteristic, role orientation, and role conflict measures would be more strongly related to organizational commitment than to job satisfaction. While some support for this hypothesis was found, the majority of relationships did not emerge as clearly as expected. For example, the personal characteristics composite was not related to role conflict as hypothesized, correlating more strongly (and significantly) with role ambiguity. Furthermore, personal characteristics were not related to either role orientation measure.

In addition, as was the case of job satisfaction, the relationships between the role stress measures and organizational commitment did not surface as clearly as hypothesized. For example, the zero-order relationship between role ambiguity and organizational commitment ($-.34$) was reduced to $-.21$ when the effects due to conflict were partialled out. Similarly, the correlation of $-.31$ between role conflict and organizational commitment dropped to $-.26$ when the effects of role ambiguity were held constant. These results suggest that both role stress measures were equally related to organizational commitment.

Although the above-mentioned relationships were not consistent with the original hypothesis, the fact that both the bureaucratic and professional role orientation measures correlated significantly with organizational commitment, while being essentially unrelated to both job scope and job satisfaction, is noteworthy. Such findings support the hypothesis that role orientation would be uniquely related to one's attitude toward the organization as a whole rather than to more specific job or task characteristics.

The final hypothesis stated that one's intention to remain a member of the organization would be influenced directly by both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while being only indirectly influenced by the remaining study variables. Table 2 contains the results of a stepwise regression designed to test this hypothesis. As expected, job satisfaction and organizational commitment accounted for a majority of the available variance in turnover intention. Specifically, job satisfaction entered the analysis first, accounting for 19.3% of the criterion variance while organizational commitment accounted for

an additional 8.7% of the available variance in turnover intention. As a set, the remaining personal characteristic, job, and role measures accounted for an additional 3.2% of the variance in turnover intention. While this value was statistically significant ($F [5,648] = 6.03, p < .01$), it should be noted that the personal characteristics composite alone accounted for half of this increment, leaving essentially nonsignificant or trivial amounts of specific variance associated with the remaining four variables. These results provide moderate support for the hypothesis that turnover intention would be directly, or more strongly, influenced by satisfaction and commitment, while being less influenced by role, personal characteristic, and task characteristic measures.

TABLE 2
Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression for Turnover Intention

<u>Measure</u>	<u>Simple</u> <u>r</u>	<u>Multiple</u> <u>R</u>	<u>Multiple</u> <u>R²</u>	<u>ΔR^2</u>	<u>F_{inc}</u>	<u>P</u>
Job satisfaction	.439	.439	.193			
Organizational commitment	.425	.529	.280	.087	78.98	.001
Personal characteristics	-.118	.544	.296	.016	14.82	.001
Job scope	.240	.551	.303	.007	6.98	.01
Professional role	-.121	.555	.308	.005	4.56	.05
Role ambiguity	-.276	.559	.312	.004	3.94	.05
Role conflict	-.260	.559	.312	.000	.016	NS

Discussion

The findings of this study can be summarized in terms of five major points. First, the results indicate that both the perceived characteristics of one's job and individual levels of role ambiguity are related to one's overall job satisfaction. Second, perceived task characteristics appear to be specific to job satisfaction while bearing no meaningful relationship to organizational commitment. Third, both bureaucratic and professional role orientation variables were important in explaining organizational commitment, and furthermore, were uniquely related to the commitment measure. Fourth, both role stress variables seem to be necessary when considering issues related to organizational commitment. Fifth, it is likely that job satisfaction and organizational commitment are the primary factors related to turnover decision-making, while task characteristics, role stress, and individual role orientation are best viewed as antecedents of satisfaction and commitment.

While this study does not represent the final chapter on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention, it does serve to elucidate and provide a more comprehensive understanding of these particular outcome variables. In addition, these results are likely generalizable to the realm of health care administration and management insofar as Navy Medical Service Corps administrators represent the full range of administrative function as opposed to a more restricted, or specialized subset of activities.

In terms of specific findings, for example, the current effort supports previous studies which concluded that role ambiguity is more strongly related to job satisfaction than is role conflict (e.g., Hamner & Tosi, 1974; House & Rizzo, 1972; Miles, 1975, 1976). Moreover, the present study found that role ambiguity was uniquely related to job satisfaction when the effects attributable to role conflict were partialled out. The present study also provided support for Steers' (1977) assertion that organizational commitment is an important, antecedent correlate of one's intention to remain with an organization. In contrast, however, the current findings did not support the conclusion by Steers that job characteristics are related to organizational commitment. Rather, it was concluded that job characteristics are uniquely related to job satisfaction, an outcome consistent with findings reported by Walsh, et al. (1980).

Future investigations in this area may benefit from attempts to clarify differences between measures of role ambiguity and of role conflict. Tracy and

Johnson (1981), for example, reported that traditional measures of conflict and ambiguity are somewhat confounded by a combination of semantic and attributional problems which could conceivably inflate the between-scale correlation, thereby limiting their usefulness. The mixed results associated with role conflict and ambiguity encountered in the current study may be clarified somewhat if such measurement difficulties are addressed.

In addition, it may prove fruitful for future investigators to attempt to identify similarities and differences in the foregoing pattern of results within various health care administration job specialties (e.g., personnel versus supply; food service versus data processing). Finally, the incorporation of career stage, need strength (e.g., achievement, affiliation), and structural (e.g., span of control, span of subordination, formalization, workgroup size) variables into studies of this type would likely shed additional light on the relationships explored in the current study.

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